

times

ethnic, ethical & aesthetical community watchdog

abacaxi network newsletter

# abacaxi

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Kim, Kim, Kim...

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# Anti Racist Action

**Abacaxi:** What kinds of organized Hate Groups have existed in Canada?

**Bill:** In the mid '70's they were active here in Toronto. The Ku Klux Klan in particular had an open organizing base, they even had an office. But they were run out by community organizations at that time. There was so much pressure they had to shut down. But they basically ended up going into hiding, preparing for a second wave. In the end of the eighties they showed a public face again, mostly in Alberta, in Saskatchewan, and of course around the Oka crisis in Quebec where they started to come out quite openly as the Klan.

Toronto is considered the center of white supremacist organization in North America at this point. Here they are strongest, with the most successful public platform, except for someone like David Duke. He is the Klan member who ran for governor in the United States. In fact he regularly writes for The Heritage Front newspaper and is revered by them because, The Heritage Front tries to project the same kind of public image.

**Abacaxi:** Is The Heritage Front a Canadian organization?

**Bill:** They are a specifically Canadian organization. Their main base is in Toronto and they are building around southern Ontario. They funnel white people that they recruit into the more underground and extreme organization like Church

of the Creator, the Ku Klux Klan and other groups that operate out of that. They have intelligence networks and they have a lot of weapons. They do military training. In fact Toronto and Wisconsin are two centres with what are called The White Berets, who are the paramilitary wing of the Church of the Creator. These military units train in Southern Ontario. In fact one of their leaders is based in Toronto, which is one of their strongholds at this point.

Another thing these far right groups have done as part of their strategy is to turn a lot of the political debate further to the right, because with the existence of extreme right wing groups in society, it makes the equally extreme but much more soft spoken and mainstream racists come across as liberals. The Tories come across as somehow middle of the road when in reality they are putting in almost all of the programs The Heritage Front wants ... the anti-immigration stuff. That's been the biggest platform of the far right across Canada. And that's coming obviously from a group that's based entirely on immigrants, because everyone here except the First Nations are immigrants. So you can't talk about logic on this one.

What these hate groups came in and did is take institution and widespread racism in society and try to organization that into not just a

political force, but one that is capable of doing damage on the streets to people.

**Abacaxi:** In the last few months we've seen a really big increase in organized violence in the streets of Toronto with 70 reported violent hate crimes since February...

**Bill:** There were 500 reported hate crimes in Toronto last year. Not all of them are nazi's...there are lots of racists...but a

*There has been continued harassment and death threats. There has been a bomb threat on an elementary school. That kind of stuff has been growing and growing*

lot are related.

In the latest wave of violence, a woman in a shelter for young abused women turned out to be a Heritage Front member. She got kicked out of the residence because she was harassing everyone else there. From there on The Heritage Front went on a rampage against members of the staff, in particular people of colour on staff. That culminated in a fire-bombing of the place.

After that there were more on the street beatings, in particular, three weeks ago a Tamil man was beaten and paralyzed from the waist down. The person who did this was a

Heritage Front member.

**Abacaxi:** How do you know that?

**Bill:** This person has been charged. He had been at a Heritage Front show that night, gotten all pumped up and went out looking for someone to beat.

Also, a black community activist that came out of a meeting late at night was jumped on by Heritage Front members who tried to beat him up. Three of them have been charged since then.

There has been continued harassment and death threats. There has been a bomb threat on an elementary school. That kind of stuff has been growing and growing.

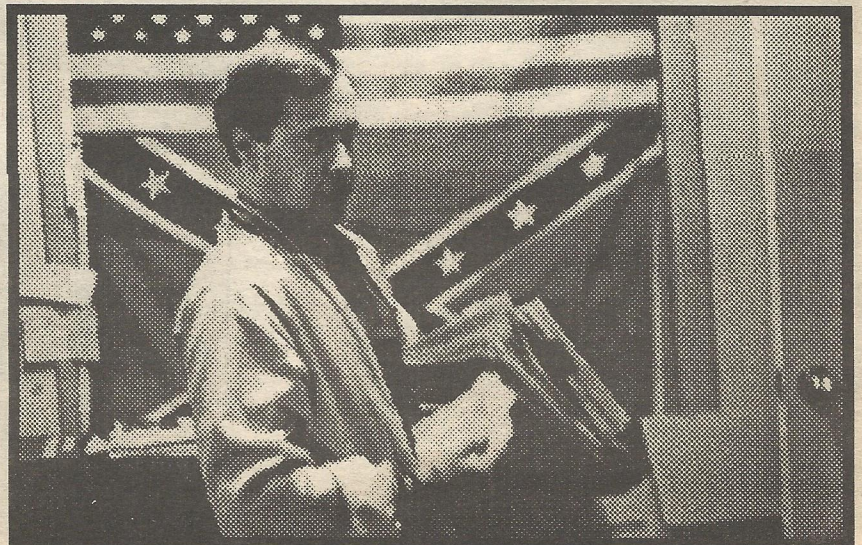
These actions are usually carried out by the underlings in the organization. But the responsibility lies with the leadership, Wolfgang Droege, Gary Shipper, George Birdie... but they're immune from prosecution. They have a barrier between them and the law.

**In the Last Year, here has been a sharp increase in violent beatings against people of colour and gays and lesbians on the streets of Toronto. As a contribution to the various debates around how to fight racism and homophobia, Abacaxi presents this interview with a spokesperson of Anti Racist Action (ARA), a youth group receiving much attention for its radical & sometimes controversial tactics. Bill is a pseudonym.**

**Abacaxi:** How did ARA form?

**Bill:** We came together last September due to a court appearance by Wolfgang Droege, the leader of The Heritage Front. The Native Canadian Centre had initiated a complaint about the hate line to the Human Rights

Commission. They were then joined by the Canadian Jewish Congress in pushing it through. So the Human Rights Commission wanted to shut down the hate line. It's been running for 2 years, running all sorts of absolutely vile messages against First Nations Peoples, Jews, gays and lesbians, almost





street level protest was going to be the most effective thing in the short term at shutting them down. This was something lacking in the other groups.

There was a lot working within the legal system, lobbying politicians, educational

forums... I think we have managed to operate with other groups, the more institution or mainstream groups. I think it's working like a parallel strategy... we take things into the streets, into the high schools, and they take things into another level. I think that we've seen that a lot in the last couple weeks, where the more mainstream groups were able to say that because of all the fuss ARA has created, and there's been a lot of fuss, these mainstream groups have been able to say... well look, unless you listen to us, deal with us and address our concerns, you'll end up seeing what happens when ARA does something. Because, if we can't prove we are effective working within the system, then people are going to turn to methods like what ARA has been using.

*Abacaxi: Could you give a short chronology of ARA activities?*

Bill: Well, after the hate line demonstration, we immediately started working within the high schools. The Heritage Front were aggressively campaigning in the high schools and we wanted to do something about that.

Our first organized ARA demonstration

was when we heard that The Heritage Front were going to be having a public meeting in an undisclosed location with international neo-nazis speakers. We found out the location and got about 250 people out to where they were holding the rally. By surrounding the hall and pelting them with eggs they had to shut down the show and walk out past us. There was a sense then that they couldn't organization

***So they charged into the crowd with their horses and started beating on people. People were injured. We went to the Police Services Bureau and lodged a complaint.***

publicly anymore.

From then on we went on to do more demonstrations... about lesbian and gay people getting bashed here and in Montreal where a man was murdered by neo-nazis. More demonstrations with Black Action Defence Committee around police

shootings. Then on to the next court appearance for the hate line on January 25th.

We had heard that they would be marching there. Our position all along has been that we aren't going to allow organization neo-nazis marches in the streets. It's an affront to everybody, a provocation.

We went down with 500 people that morning. The police had asked The Heritage Front to go around a different route to get into the courtroom. They refused, so the police took their marching orders from them and said... well, if we can't move 30 neo-nazis, then we'll go and move these 500 anti-racists instead, which seemed more to their liking. So they charged into the crowd with their horses and started beating on people. People were injured. We went to the Police Services Bureau and lodged a complaint.

From then on we have been organizing in coalitions with other people. There was a sense across the anti-racist movement that something had to be done, but nothing was getting done. The legal

system was not going to do anything about it, regardless of whether they have the political will to do it, which may be a big question.

We saw them pushing the limits of how far they could go. That's a principle of power, to find out how much people are willing to put up with without reacting and fighting back, and that's exactly how much they'll be subjected to, somebody has to set the limits.

So we had to show that they were vulnerable, that people weren't going to put up with this anymore. So we planned a march on a centre of their organization, particularly the place where the hate line was being operated from out of.

We didn't disclose the location in advance. We told people what we were marching to and made clear on our posters what the issues were.

A lot of people talk about the violence that happened there. I think that on June 11th we avoided a lot of violence, because if we had marched to where the neo-nazis thought we were marching, which

anyone that isn't white, male, heterosexual, and some of those get trashed too. They use it too publicize their events and meetings. Its one of their most effective organizing tools.

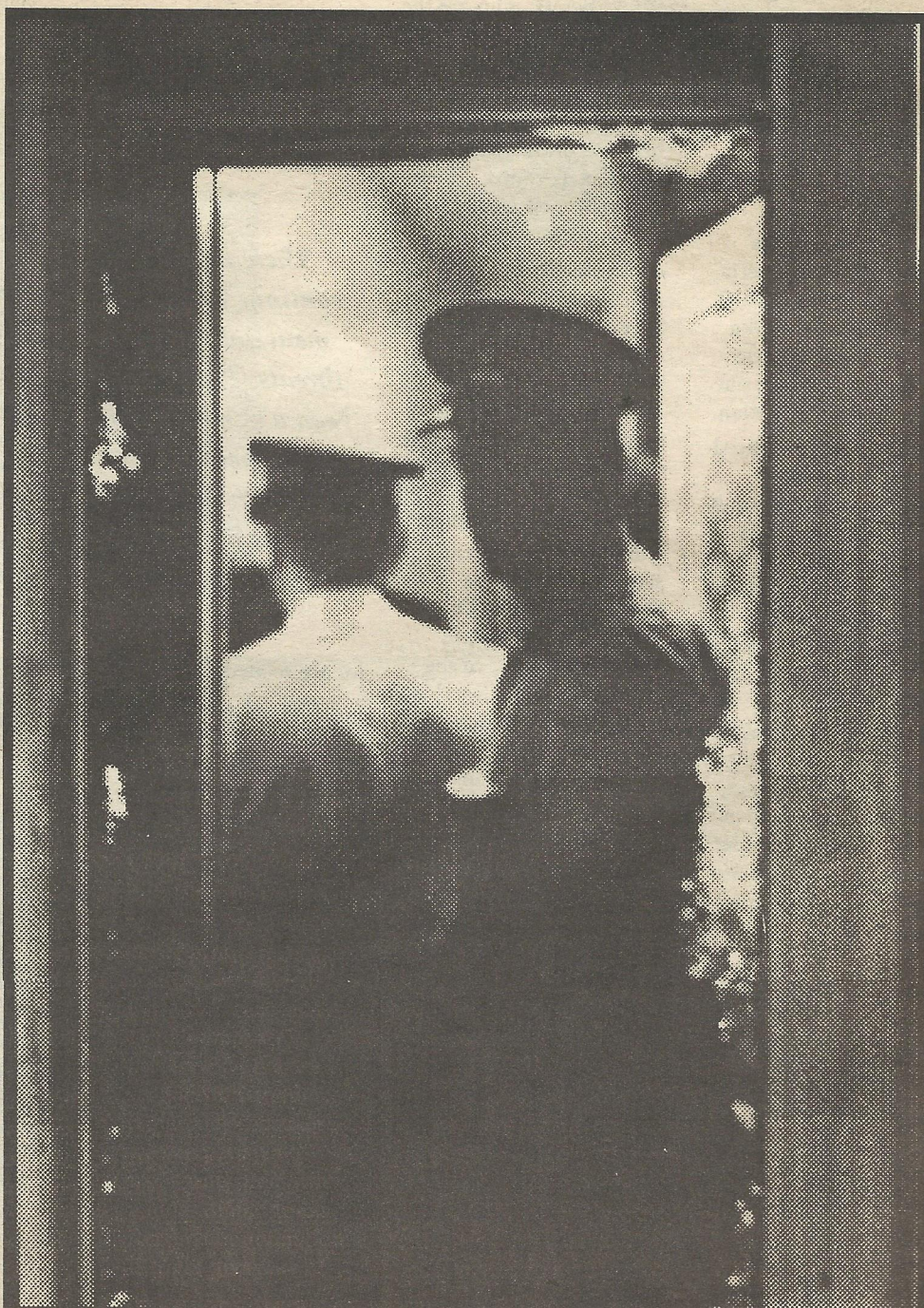
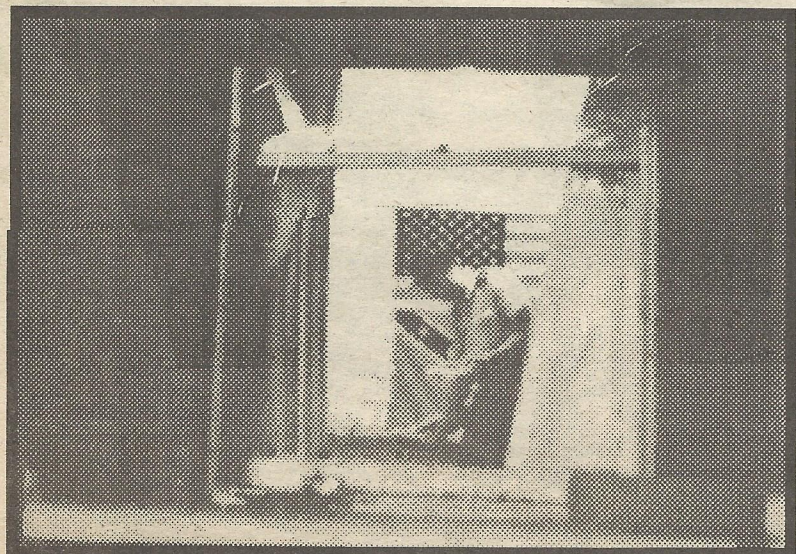
We knew that The Heritage Front were going to march to the courtroom as a nazi group, and we thought that was unacceptable. We got about 100 people to the courtroom. The main thing was to say that you can't march on the streets and expect it to be taken for granted that that's ok.

After the demonstration (we weren't an organization yet) there was a forum at the Native Canadian Centre where the main thing they said about fighting the rise of far right groups is that you have to go and organization within your own community.

When we started getting together we took a look at who was there and thought ... there's a lot of young people here and that's where we can organization among young people. We had a specific role to play within the high schools that older organizationanization with older people can't play because they don't have the same communication happening.

*Abacaxi: Why did ARA decide to work the way you do? What is the difference in strategy between you and other groups?*

As far as the politics developed, we felt the



was Ernst Zundels house...they had covered the whole house in plastic and stationed 50 neo-nazis nearby, waiting for us to come by. They had specifically issued threats that they were going to pound us and kill us.

We didn't go up that route. We left those people standing there waiting while we were at the other location, where the windows got smashed and some stinkbombs were thrown.

Since then, there have been four anti-racists charged with mischief

For instance, a few weeks ago, the border authorities tried to stop the new Bell Hooks book, a prominent black intellectual writer. It was stopped at the border under the guise that it was hate literature. The hate literature laws were used to stop that. This is very dangerous. Certainly gay and lesbian stuff is stopped constantly. So, I'm really uncomfortable with trying to push for laws or ways of giving the state more power.

*Abacaxi: How do you deal with the question of*

absurd, because if white people had equal rights to everyone else, there wouldn't be a problem. But they have privilege over everybody else, that's the problem. They see affirmative action and immigration programs as special privileges. These are privileges that white people have enjoyed for centuries here in Canada and they want to keep them.

*Abacaxi: How do you respond to the criticism that ARA's action will further escalate the violence against the people that the hate groups are targeting?*

White supremacy and racism are violence. There is no such thing as a non-violent neo-nazis. Organizing against them can't make it worse. In the short term, it looks ugly. But if you look at what's going to happen if they are

let loose and let go, you'll see that the beatings are going to get worse and worse.

Arguments are always given against people who fight back...that if you don't fight back maybe you won't get hurt as bad. But the reality is that if you don't fight back, the person doing the hurting is just going to go further and further.

There is a really good reason for people to be afraid and to say, I think we are in danger, but we are in danger because neo-nazis are neo-nazis.

*Abacaxi: People experience situations differently depending on who you are and the amount of privilege you have. For some people it's easy to choose 'violent' or confrontational forms of struggle while others have to deal with that everyday, without choice. What kinds of dynamics does that set up within ARA?*

Bill: It's much easier for the white people in the group to say 'I don't want to deal with it on that level, I don't want to be involved with a struggle which is dangerous'...because we can get away from that, hide away and no one is going to come pounding on us right away.

For the lesbian

and gay members, for the people of colour in the group, it's like... 'well that's all very fine for the straight white males in the group, but the rest of the people have to deal with this whether we like it or not. It's right in our faces.

In that sense it's interesting. People have had to deal with the issue of privilege and in some cases have had to deal with giving up some degree of privilege, because suddenly they can't walk around the streets safely, because they are targeted, they're known and they are getting beaten up.

*Abacaxi: As anti-racist activists?*

Bill: As anti-racist activists.

*Abacaxi: What was the Anti-Racist Rally on July 28th about?*

Bill: There were 2000 anti-racist demonstrators. We didn't initiate any kind of violence. It showed the broad community outrage about the beatings that have been happening and show people, that they can come out and stand together.

*Abacaxi: Any closing thoughts?*

Bill: A lot of groups have been focusing on the broader struggle of fighting institutional racism, because that really is a much bigger, much more complex struggle at the moment.

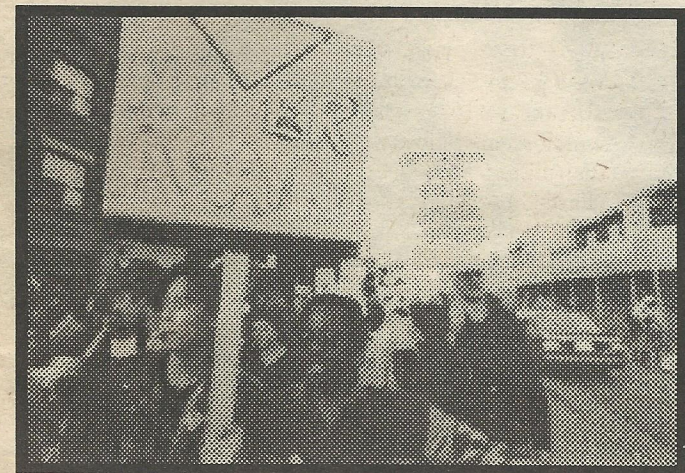
On our end we've tried to organize enough people so that we have enough strength to deal with a specific problem. I think the main thing is that you have to make sure that you have enough power collectively



to solve problems. You can only do that by being organized, by using tactics that work, and by building up on small victories.

For instance, although the neo-neo-nazis are an extreme threat right now to people...all the attacks they have been doing in the last few months, in comparison to the systemic racism that exists, are a small part of the problem. They are very immediate, but they are not the whole ball game.

One of the things I see happening is that every victory that we have against groups like The Heritage Front tends to build up power on the anti-racists movements side and enables you to tackle bigger problems as you go along. You have to be able to have victories and be able to show that you are capable of exercising that power. ARA is a step towards that.



over \$1000, disguise with intent to commit an indictable offence. One of them has been charged with council to commit an indictable offence.

*Abacaxi: What do you think of the police attitude?*

Bill: I think they have been trying to portray it as two equally bad gangs fighting it out. That's a misconception about ARA. I think that's trading form for content in some way, saying that you can compare broken glass to broken bones and broken lives.

What happened there was a minor bit of property damage. It was enough to hurt The Heritage Front as an organization, and that's significant. Where as the legality or illegality as far the police are concerned... it was a very minor breach of the law compared to what's been going on.

*Abacaxi: Should we be relying on the law authorities to stop them or should we allow them freedom of speech?*

Bill: I am pretty wary of handing the state a lot of power to crack down on neo-nazis. We favor the grassroots efforts at stopping them. People organizing themselves. Because history has shown that power in those hands (the state), has been used against the very opposite people.

*freedom of speech?*

Bill: That's an issue pointed out by not just neo-nazis but leveled at us all the time. It's an evasion of the real issue, to portray it as a freedom of speech thing. What we are talking about is organization violence. What these groups are about is not just expressing an opinion, it's about organi-

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zation to deny other people their right. White supremacy isn't about respecting other peoples right.

What we are talking about is a defensive measure in response to that, not about taking away other peoples rights, but defending them.

The platform that they are trying to put forward publicly is that they are just promoting their culture, white culture, 'a' white culture. 'Equal rights for whites' is one of their slogans. That's

